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ABSTRACT

A problem solving process has been created for analyzing descriptive data obtained from the language transactions between parents and children during a shared reading event. Use of other instruments and observations of videotaped interactions led to a classification of reading event components and to a coding system containing items in the following categories: (1) parent/child initiated dialogue outside actual text reading, (2) parent/child response in dialogue outside actual text, (3) teaching strategies of parent when child reads, (4) child's reading strategies, (5) tenor of the relationship, and (6) time factors. Each item is assigned a positive and negative value. A parent-child reading partnership scale provides a descriptive summary statement of the interaction. Its categories include introduction of the reading task, elaboration on pictures as part of the text, elaboration of text, conclusions and feedback at the end of the reading event, and strategies used for encouraging the reading partnership. (JL)

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A PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS IN ANALYZING PARENT-CHILD LANGUAGE TRANSACTIONS IN A READING EVENT

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The purpose of this report is not to share the results of research but to share a problem-solving process that was used for analyzing descriptive data which attended to the language transactions between parents and children during a shared reading event. Teale's (1981, p. 908) review of what is known about parents reading to children concluded that "we must seek additional interactional descriptions of the activity of story book reading and be more specific with regard to causal relationships between experiences in being read to and the development of literacy in children." These are appropriate considerations for researchers. However, analyzing "interactional descriptions" -- the data relevant to study of the "causal relationships" referred to by Teale -- necessitates a naturalistic research paradigm, and, therefore, leads to procedures outside conventional statistical analyses methods. Sharing the procedure used in this language transaction study may aid others in investigations of teaching strategies that influence children's learning to read.

Data Dictate the Analysis Procedure

Initial Considerations

With an experimental design, assumptions about what will happen under specific conditions underscore the questions to be answered through planned investigation. It is impossible, however, to make prior assertions about what will happen in natural home learning environments, or, more specifically, what the parent-child interactions will be during a particular event. Each home provides a different learning environment and parent-child transactions in a teaching-learning situation not only vary between families but also between the same parent and child in different tasks.

Videotaping captures these varied situations so that the interactional data

can be viewed and studied repeatedly. This procedure, unlike a controlled experimental research design, sets up a process which permits the data to dictate many of the questions to be asked as well as how to find the answers to these questions. In this process the first step is to determine a systematic way for tuning into what the data are saying.

For our purposes, we turned to an instrument designed by Guinagh and Jester (1972, pp. 171-177) and used by them to analyze the behaviors of mothers as they shared a picture book with their young children. In all but one of the ten scale items on the Parent As Reader Scale (PARS), there is an implication that the amount and quality of language the mothers use are directly related to the quality of her teaching behaviors. For example, the lowest rating level of one scale item is use of "vague language," described as "absolutely no teaching." The highest rating level for that item is coded when the mother uses "very detailed language" in discussing the pictures with the child.

The PARS also reflects the influence of Gordon's (1970) Desirable Teaching Behaviors (DTBs) used in his Parent Education Model of Project Follow Through (1968to present) to demonstrate and evaluate effective teaching strategies for parents to use with their children (Gordon & Brievogel, 1976; Olmsted, 1979; Olmsted, Webb, & Ware, 1977). For example, the DTBs focus on parents asking questions that have more than one correct answer or require more than one-word answers, explaining tasks to children and encouraging responses for the learners. The PARS shows similarity in the rating levels of the scale items: parent tells, asks, discusses, repeats, expands.

Both instruments clearly suggest that certain characteristics of language functions occur between the teacher and the learner. The language of the teaching parent promotes or enables certain response behaviors in the child's demonstration of learning. Combined, these two assessment means led us to focus our initial attention on reoccuring language exchanges between parent and child in each of our

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videotapings.

The Tapes Speak and Lead Toward a Coding System

The initial study of the tapes led to the following observations:

1. Parent-initiated dialogue appeared to have varied meaning intent.
2. The language of the parent and, therefore, the meaning intent appeared to change when the parent initiated dialogue with a statement rather than a question.
3. Child-response differed depending upon interpretation of meaning intent of the questions as well as interpretation of the parent-initiated statements.
4. Child-initiated dialogue, either with questions or statements, produced parent-response that seemed to have different language characteristics from when the parent initiated the interaction.
5. Parent-child language interaction in the shared discussion of a book seemed to affect the opportunities for the child to join in the actual reading event.
6. When the child assumed an assisted, cooperative or independent reading role, the language of the parent appeared to carry different meaning intent and therefore functioned differently.

These notations indicated that languaging characteristics held clues to parent expectations of the child and the child's response to these expectations, a seemingly important linkage to teaching and learning strategies during the shared reading experience. In other words, the content of the language (what was said), the context of the language situation (when it was said), and the tone of the language exchange (how it was said) appeared related to the quality of the language transactions and the meaning exchange between parent and child as well as to the success of the teaching and learning process.

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Halliday's (1975) concept of register (field, tenor and mode) supports this discovery of the importance of "climate" found in the transactional process. Field was the familiar home setting in all instances. Tenor, involving role relationships, changed depending upon which member of the dyad initiated the dialogue, how the responder interpreted the question or comment, and which member seemed to be in control or took control of the situation. The tenor reflected the meaning intent of either the parent or the child. And, although the mode of the register was always oral language, the language of conversation or that of directed teaching responses to the child's oral reading of the book were different from one another.

Further Considerations from the Tape Typescripts

Unconfirmed interpretation of what was being heard and seen throughout the total reading event now necessitated careful examination of accurate transcripts of each video tape. Borrowing from the Guinagh and Jester instrument, the typescripts divided the reading event into the following components: (1) the introduction to the book: any language transaction between parent and child before the actual reading of the story began; (2) the body of the text: the discussion of the written picture texts during either the parent's or child's reading; (3) the concluding of the reading event: talking about the content of the book or the shared experience; and (4) the climate of the relationship between the dyad (supported more recently by Halliday's notion of tenor). Two additional components were added: (5) the teaching strategies of the parent when the child joined in the reading process; and (6) the learning/reading strategies of the child.

The typescripts included the story text along with the parent-child language beyond the text. Each complete language-expressed idea was then labeled as a question or statement, defined as to meaning intent (see coding items), marked as initiating or responding dialogue, and checked as to who was the initiator of

responder in each instance. It was here that we first noted that the text sometimes triggered both initiating and responding comments of the child. An example may explain. A child reading the recent Goss and Harste book, It Didn't Frighten Me, turned the page, saw one of the imaginary creatures, and said: "A dinosaur! -- or is that a dragon?" The response was found in the written text as he continued to read: ". . . a pink dinosaur up in my tree." This, too, was coded in the child's learning-reading strategies.

Verification of Transcript and Tape Notations

Tapes were viewed now to verify the accuracy of the notations on the transcripts, to focus once more on the tenor of the interaction, and to note the nonverbal behaviors of both the parents and children. In these viewings, another important characteristic of the reading event drew immediate attention: the element of time!

First, there was the length of time spent in the total event: was the book only read or was there time to talk about it? There was also the time spent in the introduction of the reading event before beginning the story. This appeared to correlate with Gordon's (1970) notion that the parent needed to provide an opportunity for the child to get acquainted with the task at hand. The third time consideration was the length of time the parent allowed to lapse between asking a question or making a comment and then either asking the question again or providing the answer for the child. This time element, too, was stressed in one of Gordon's DTBs: giving the learner enough time to think about the problem. Interestingly enough, the length of time the parent sat quietly without asking or commenting also appeared to increase the self-initiated efforts of the child. The fourth time element noted was the time spent looking at the "picture-text" -- another opportunity for parent/child discussion.

It appeared that a manageable and reliable coding system was now possible.

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All verified notations on the typescripts were transferred onto coding sheets for analysis of each occuring language transaction.

THE CODING AND ANALYSIS INSTRUMENTS

The Parent-Child Reading Partnership Coding System

The following components and items are noted in the coding system. Plus and minus values in the coding items are assigned to language behaviors which enable or limit the child's full participation in initiating/responding dialogue. Similarly, values are assigned to teaching strategies that either control or accept the child's natural learning-to-read strategies.

Reading Event Components

1. Setting the stage: introduction to the event and book
2. Exchanging meaning between author, child, parent
   a. Use of illustrations to supplement/extend the text
   b. Discussion within the written text content
3. Concluding the reading event
4. Teaching strategies used by parent to enable child's participation
5. Learning/reading strategies used by the child, including child's reading model: mumble reading, memory reading, cooperative reading (joining in repetitive phrases), assisted reading (receiving strategy clues and using these), independent reading (terms taken from Doake, 1979.)
6. Tenor evidenced in the relationship between parent and child

Coding Items

A. Parent/Child Initiated Dialogue Outside Actual Text Reading

\- 1. Interrogation questions: expect or demand "right answer" response

\+ 2. Request questions: used for clarification, confirmation, information

\+ 3. Invitation questions: promote elaboration, prediction, participation

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- 4. Insistence comments: give repetitive direction; "nagging"; "do-it-my-way"
- 5. Direction comments: tell what to do and how to do
+ 6. Information comments: provide explanation, clarification, relevent clues
+ 7. Invitation comments: encourage elaboration, prediction or risk-taking

B. Parent/Child Response in Dialogue Outside Actual Text

- 1. Ignores comments/questions (usually nonverbal behavior)
- 2. Corrects/rejects interpretations or predictions
+ 3. Promotes or provides additional cues/information/clarification
+ 4. Promotes or provides further elaboration
+ 5. Promotes or provides prediction/risk-taking
+ 6. Confirms/supports predictions/interpretations
+ 7. Values/praises (usually in parent responses)
- 8. Gives expected response (usually in child responses)
-(P);+(c) 9. Takes control

C. Teaching Strategies of Parent When Child Reads

- 1. Has child read only "known" words
- 2. Supplies word for child
- 3. Has child "sound out," spell, or "repeat-after-me"
- 4. Corrects word substitutions or rejects what child says
+ 5. Encourages risk-taking and child initiation
+ 6. Confirms and accepts
+ 7. Provides appropriate cues/suggestions
+ 8. Responds interactively to child's reading
+ 9. Gives appropriate praise

D. Child's Reading Strategies

+ 1. Uses picture cues

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+ 2. Uses content cues

+ 3. Uses meaningful word substitutions

+ 4. Self-corrects word substitutions

- 5. Relies on parent's model-of-reading influence: "sounds out", spells

+ 6. Establishes own model of reading: hypothesizes, tests, self-corrects, etc.

+ 7. Uses one of these modes of reading: mumble reading; memory reading; cooperative, assisted, or independent reading (Doake, 1979)

E. Tenor of the Relationship

(1) 1. Formal: flat or neutral

(2) 2. Informal: friendly and supportive

(3) 3. Responsive, accepting and motivating

F. Time Factors

1. Total reading event time

2. Introduction time

3. Picture text page time

+ or - 4. Time lapse between aprent question/chid response or parent requestion or parent-provided answer

Instructions for Data Coding Language transactions are coded for each of the first five components of the Reading Event. All coding is done for each page of the book, both written and picture text pages. Meaningful language episodes are coded rather than fragmenting language into words or sentences alone. For example: "Start over. Read this again." is coded as one statement since the intent is the same in each sentence. Dialogue exchanges are numbered to indicate order of initiation, response, returned response, etc. Time elements are noted for total event time, time in the introduction to the event, time spent with the picture and written text and time lapse between questions and answers.

Instructions for Data Analysis. Each initiating and responding item in

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Sections A and B of the Coding Items has been assigned a positive or negative value, as indicated. If the language behavior (i.e., interrogation question, a negative value) is evidenced, it is then marked with a plus (+) for analysis purpose; if it is not noted, it is marked with a minus (-). The number of plus and minus factors in each reading event component is totaled to determine a clear majority in either case. For example, if there are more interrogation questions than not, then that component is given a plus value. These values are computed (a plus and negative equals zero; two negatives or two positives equal one) and produce a numerical rating for the language transaction between parent and child in each of the first three Reading Components.

Sections C and D are rated according to this same process with a total rating computed for the parent's actual teaching strategies and the child's reading strategies. Section E (Tenor) is given as a numberical rating of 1 for formal; 2 for informal; 3 for responsive. Time factors in Section F are noted for 1, 2 and 3; and a plus value is recorded for seconds beyond four or a negative value for seconds less than fine.

Categorizing Findings. The total numerical ratings for each parent-child language transactions in each of the six components of the reading event ranged from 0 to 9. It appeared that there were distinct differences in these language transactions within the 0 through 3, the 4 through 6, and the 7 through 9 numerical total. Therefore, the following scale indicates the three rating levels for each component . . . a descriptive summary statement regarding a general category for the parent-child languaging during the reading event.

The Parent-Child Reading Partnership Scale

1. Introduction of Reading Task

    1. Vague comments by parent: "We're going to read this book." Or parent reads title of book but provides no opportunity for child response or discussion. (0-3)

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2. Parent initiates comments or raises questions about the book -- what it might be about from the cover picture; encourages child to get acquainted with the book; allows time for child response and elaboration. (4-6)

3. Child initiates comments or raises questions about the book; parent responds in an encouraging and speculating manner and accepts child's direction. (7-9)

II. Elaboration on Pictures as Part of the Text

1. Limited opportunities provided by the parent for child to take note of pictures in relationship to text; may point to pictures, but does not take time for response from child; limited, if any, acknowledgement by parent that pictures provide clues to text. (0-3)

2. Parent initiates dialogue in elaboration of pictures' relationship to text; makes appropriate comments or asks questions that enable and encourage discussion. (4-6)

3. Child initiates comments about pictures and elaborates on ideas for the story as stimulated by the pictures; parent accepts and responds in supporting ways. (7-9)

III. Elaboration of Text

1. Limited, if any, information provided by the parent to explain the text content or to relate it to the experiences of child; no opportunity for chil to express own notions and ideas. (0-3)

2. Parent initiates discussion that relates events in the text to child's experiences or expands upon the text in response to the author's intent; child is encouraged to enter into the dialogue; contribution is received in an accepting way. (4-6)

3. Child initiates discussion in elaboration of text content; relates to own experiences; responds to author's intent; parent's response indicates interest in and acceptance of child's ideas and predictions. (7-9)

IV. Conclusions and Feedback at the End of the Reading Event

1. Parent ends reading task without comment or opportunity for child to talk about text content; asks a question that does not invite further discussion. (0-3)

2. Parent initiates discussion regarding text content; child responds and adds to discussion. (4-6)

3. Child initiates discussion; may look through book and talk about what has been read; may reread text or retell story; parent responds in positive way which permits discussion to continue until child ends the reading event. (7-9)

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V. Strategies Used for Encouraging the Reading Partnership

1. Parent either provides no opportunity for child to become a reading partner or else insists that child tries to read "known" words; parent ignores child's efforts to join in the reading process through mumble reading, memory reading or cooperative reading. (0-3)

2. Parent elicits child's aprticipation in the reading process; provides opportunities or encourages child to read familiar phrases; enjoys child's attempt to read and supports these efforts; accepts child's reading partnership with appropriate teaching behaviors. (4-6)

3. Child initiates the reading partnership; parent responds in supportive, accepting, noncorrecting ways and evidences enjoyment in the shared experience. (7-9)

Labeling the Categories. Coding the oral and written language transactions between parent and child during a shared reading event, we were able to use the scale to describe three models of parents' teaching strategies, with implied children's learning/reading strategies. A consistent scale rating of 1 describes a nonfacilitating model of teaching. This model limits the child's opportunities to become an active learner. The parent does not appear to view reading a book as a teacher/learning event, does not facilitate participation by the child, or ignores any efforts of the child and may, in fact, reject those efforts.

A rating of 2 indicates parent-initiated/child-response model of teaching. This model is viewed by many as a "good" teaching model. The teaching adult asks open-ended questions that encourage more than one right answer and makes statements that invite elaborated responses from the learner. Although there is a positive give and take in the teaching/learning process, the parent is the initiator, or teacher, in the interaction. There is support for the child's reading efforts, but efforts under the direct instruction of the parent.

The child-initiated, self-help/parent-facilitating model of teaching strategies is the label for a consistent scale rating of 3. This model leads directly towards an improved learning model for the child. The child initiates

far more than the parent and is encouraged and permitted to predict, to question, to be self-directing. The parent responds in a confirming, accepting and supporting way. The result is a child who demonstrates a personally meaningful and natural learning-to-read process.

CONCLUSION

The process of answering an answerable question through descriptive research procedures is a rigorous analytic procedure. It is not an "easy way out" of experimental designs and conventional statistical analysis. It requires that the researcher believe that the data will point the direction to the heart of the question. In this particular study it was not just a question of discovering the language transactions between parents and child but to determine the ways in which oral language functions to enable the natural reading of children. The problem solving processes in descriptive research are challenging and valid means for reliable research findings.

This paper has attempted to illustrate the need for further communication among researchers on such research.

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